

United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

ECOLOGICAL SERVICES
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ES-61130-Billings
M.32 – NRCS - FSA

November 22, 2006

Producer
CRP Contract Participant
Montana

Dear Mr. or Mrs. Producer:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) recently became aware that some private lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) have prairie dog communities present, and that producers may be required to control black-tailed prairie dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) on contract acreage, or lose their benefits. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supports Montana's *Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy* and maintaining current prairie dog communities on private, state, and federal lands.

Although the CRP Appendix addresses the establishment and maintenance of the approved cover, the Service recommends that the requirement be waived. The black-tailed prairie dog is a 'nongame species in need of management' under Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) statute (87-5-102, MCA), as well as a 'vertebrate pest' under Montana Department of Agriculture statute (807-1101, MC). The MFWP also designates black-tailed and white-tailed prairie dogs as a 'species of concern' (<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/concern/default.html>) and a 'Tier I species' (i.e. greatest conservation need; <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/cfwcs/strategy.html>) in Montana's *Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy*. One of the strategies is to institute a landowner incentive program designed to manage prairie dog acreage, rather than eradicate prairie dogs.

Conflicts can arise between the prairie dog and other land uses. The Montana's Conservation Strategy identifies and supports solutions to short-term and long-term biological and social problems related to the black-tailed prairie dog communities and their management.

Although there is no current state statute or administrative rule in Montana that requires landowners to control prairie dogs that migrate onto adjacent private lands, CRP does require that pests be controlled on land subject to a CRP contract to the extent necessary to ensure that

the establishment and maintenance of the approved cover is adequately protected and to provide such maintenance as necessary to avoid an adverse impact on surrounding land.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has asked the Montana State FSA Committee to consider Montana's Conservation Strategy and allow landowners the option of controlling the prairie dog communities on CRP in part or in whole or allowing these prairie dog communities to be managed by the landowner.

If you have prairie dog communities on land enrolled in CRP, we recommend that you contact your local FSA Office to discuss options available to you. Please contact Lou Hanebury, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, at 406-247-7367 or Allison Begley, MFWP's Native Species Biologist at 406-247-2966 if additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

R. Mark Wilson
Field Supervisor